



ONLINE ACADEMIC COUNSELING-A FUTURISTIC MODEL IN DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR HEALTH SCIENCES PROGRAMMES

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Introduction:

The present era demands inclusion of teacher student learning processes into the digitalized world of learning to keep in line with the ever-changing communication – technology. Online digital world provides a platform for varied teacher student interactions be it counseling, advising, tutoring, discussions and other services which are apt for the learners during the period they are pursuing their studies at an institution of distance learning. Keeping the basic principles of open and distance in mind, the idea of Online Academic Counseling is liberating one since it gives the chance to move towards technology-enabled learning with a presence at varied interfaces.

Concept :

Online Academic Counseling is where in a variety of tasks of teaching learning process can be catered which are tutoring, counseling, guidance, information about courses and curriculum, guidance about assignments, creating and maintaining motivation and so on. Academic Counseling is a face to face interaction with a view to develop contact between teachers/counselors and learners in the distance education system which can be completed with new innovative idea where in the contact is by online mode.

Online Academic Counseling can serve as an important means to reach out to the learners near and far who are pursuing distance courses and want to study at their own pace and place, require help throughout the programme and wish to maintain contact which is not limited to certain face to face interactions. It can also be taken as a complementary means along with traditional academic counseling but also an alternative mode for teaching learning process, alternative to face to face academic counseling.

Importance

Online academic counseling is futuristic and a feasible platform to learning in professional programmes in the distance education system. The concept is important especially in professional programmes where the expertise is less and the catering learner group is from varied backgrounds and similar standards of academic counseling has to be maintained for a programme. It is also important for professional purposes since it is helpful in catering to learners' needs 24x7. Also, the media has narrowed the gap which used to exist between learner and teacher. It has been well documented that mass media of today are a boon for the fast delivery and better out-reach to the learners providing an evidence of the success of online methodology of teaching-learning.

Online Academic Counselling in Context of Health Sciences Programme of Post Basic BSc Nursing

Programme Background:

Post Basic BSc Nursing programme of IGNOU is an important professional programme for in-service Diploma holder Nurses to upgrade their knowledge and skills and earn a degree in Nursing. The programme involves theory and practical components being imparted to the learners throughout the country. The programme structure is as follows:

Theory Courses : 40 credits

First Year : 18
Second Year: 10
Third Year : 12

Practical Courses : 68 credits

First Year : 18
Second Year: 26
Third Year : 24

List of Theory Courses

Year	Title	Course Code	Credits	No. of Blocks	No of Assign-ments (Hours)	Counselling Sessions (Hours)	Self Study (Hours)
1st Year	Nursing Foundation	BNS- 101	4	4	2	24	96
	Applied Sciences	BNS-102	4	5	2	15	105
	Maternal Nursing	BNS-103	2	2	1	12	48
	Communicative English	BNS-104	4	4	2	12	108
	Behavioural Sciences	BNS-105	4	4	2	24	96
Total			18	19	9	87	453
2nd Year	Medical Surgical Nursing	BNS-106	4	4	2	24	96
	Paediatric Nursing	BNS-107	2	3	1	12	48
	Mental Health Nursing	BNS-108	2	4	2	24	96
Total			10	11	5	60	240
3rd Year	Community Health Nursing	BNS-109	4	4	2	24	96
	Nursing Administration	BNS-110	4	4	2	24	96
	Nursing Education and Research	BNS-111	4	4	2	24	96
Total			12	12	6	72	288
Grand Total			40	42	20	219	981

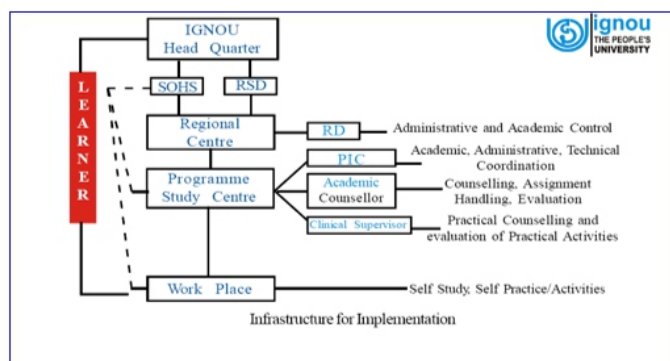
Total Hours of Theory and Self Study: 219+981=1200

List of Practical Courses

Year	Title	Course Code	Credits	No. of Blocks	Practical Contact Sessions (Hours)	Self Study Activities (Hours)
1st Year	Nursing Foundation	BNSL-101	4	1	60	60
	Applied Sciences	BNSL-102	4	4	112	08
	Maternal Nursing	BNSL-103	8	4	120	120
	Behavioural Sciences	BNSL-105	2	1	30	30
Total			18	11	322	218
2nd Year	Medical Surgical Nursing	BNSL-106	10	2	150	150
	Paediatric Nursing	BNSL-107	8	2	120	120
	Mental Health Nursing	BNSL-108	8	2	120	120
Total			26	6	390	390
3rd Year	Community Health Nursing	BNSL-109	8	2	120	120
	Nursing Administration	BNSL-110	6	2	90	90
	Nursing Education and Research	BNSL-111	8	2	120	120
	Computer in Nursing	BNSL-112	2	2	30	30
Total			24	8	360	360
Grand Total			68	24	1072	968

Total Hours of Self Activities and Practical Contact Sessions : 968 + 1072 = 2040

The programme is delivered through a network of PSCs established in recognized Colleges of Nursing. The programme reaches out to varied learner groups of Nurses all through out the country. Since this programme leads to a professional degree, there is a need to develop competencies, knowledge and skills so that the learner can complete with conventional degree holders.

Existing Model of Academic Counselling:**Fig1: Model of Academic Counselling in Post Basic B.sc Nursing**

The existing model for Post Basic BSc Nursing as shown in the Fig 1. It involves the coordination between HQS, RC and PSC. The PSC is located in recognized Colleges of Nursing. At the PSC, learners have the Programme Incharge and Academic Counselors who guide, tutor and help the learners during the course/programme. Also the learners can practice the activities under supervisor at their workplace and PSC. The model is unique and works well since it gives a chance to the learner to learn as per feasibility.

However, many challenges are faced by the learners in this existing system which are as follows:

- The existing model requires the establishment of PSC recognized by Indian Nursing Council (INC) for both Theory and Practical Counseling.
- The recognition of the number of PSC's by Indian Nursing Council does-not synchronize with the demand for the programme. Therefore, there are more learners wishing to enroll for the programme and lesser number of PSCs and hence, many learners are unable to join in.
- Non-availability of PSCs in all regions due to various administrative and technical reasons disallows the basic mandate of reaching out to the unreached.
- Availability of PSCs away from the workplace/home of the learners is opposite to the idea of distance education which is to be present at learners door-steps.
- Candidates for the programme are Inservice and need to mandatorily attend the theory and practical counseling for the courses of the programme. Hence, it is difficult for learners to take time out and regularly travel to the PSCs which are located far away. At the far way PSCs the problems of accommodation, food, health and other issues arise since the learners are away from their homes studying in the PSC.
- Moreover, they have various family responsibilities like children, aged family members and professional commitments which makes it difficult to be available for academic counseling all the time.
- The learners need to take leaves which are many times denied making it difficult for them to attend the academic counseling sessions.
- Programme Study centers are located across the country and hence, various regional, state and cultural factors may effect the standards of delineating the similar course content to all.

Keeping this in mind, it is important to focus one's mind on the idea of Online academic counseling for theory courses for this programme though the practical counseling remains mandatory.

Why Online Academic Counselling:

Online Academic counseling for Post Basic B.Sc. Nursing would help in providing an excellent academic support and also help in maintaining contact between the learners and counselors all over the country. This will help in managing student data and also produce data base of teachers and students with a good student tracking system when linked with a learner management system wherein the data can be stored and retrieved as per need. It will also help to provide interaction between Faculty at headquarter, expert academic counselors and learners who are separated from distance and time frame.

Given the differences in expertise and facilities of Programme Study centres, Online Academic Counselling shall be a boon in upkeeping similar standards of education throughout the country. It can also be well appreciated that provision of online academic counseling would not only provide a platform for theoretical queries but also help in live demonstrations for practical purposes too thus, reducing a burden to learners for already compulsory theory and practical sessions. The training of trainers via online system can promote the view that similar

knowledge and skill will be imparted to academic counselors in the country which will promote similar skills and help in knowledge development in the learners who are the Nurses located at the distance from the IGNOU Headquarters.

It also can be well appreciated that the Online Academic Counselling will help to cater the academic counselors and learners by providing the platform to interact, advise, mentor, learn, teach, chat and guide as per their own feasibility, pace and place. It will help in inclusion of teacher-learner processes in digitalized mode which is more permanent and has a better retention. Also, it would be useful to manage counselors and learners across the country. Pre-admission, Post-admission and the general support would help in smooth sailing for the learner through the process. It will help to provide a student with counselor tracking system which is essential for successful completion of programme

Tools of Online Academic Counselling like chats, emails, discussion forms, live demos, videos, e-content, podcasts and so on may be utilized.

The online academic counseling can boost the learners critical thinking by holding discussions on varied topics. Since, the learners are In-service they already are a source of practical knowledge and evidence themselves. The learners can discuss on a point, refer back and generate enough data for participating in the discussion forums or live chats, so that counselor can take a back-seat and independent learning can be promoted.

Also, in major discussions, the faculty of the headquarters, experts in the areas, academic counselors, peer group from varied locations can come on a same forum to give opinions and solve problems. The synchronous and asynchronous mode can help to store data and view later on as per the feasibility of the learners. The direct contact with the students can help keep the track of their success, failure, assignments, tracking of course material, e-content, videos, evaluation for theory and practicals which is many a times missed and would add to better management of the student's data and promote better student support.

The proposed Model of teaching learning for Online Academic Counselling in Post Basic BSc Nursing

A collaborative and multi-disciplinary model which caters the development of a counselor-learner management system is the basis for development of Online Academic Counseling platform. It needs collaborating of HQS, RC and PSCs. The model requires the following infrastructure for launching and successful run:

1. Personnel:

- **Academic Manpower:** The Academic manpower at the headquarters, at Regional Centers and the PSCs include the faculty, experts and counselors who will provide academic support to the learner.
- **Non-Academic Manpower:** The technical staff, data entry operators, computer engineers and experts, software designers, audio and video producers and other such officials will act as non-academic manpower to provide technical support in the running of the Online Counseling.
- **Learners:** Our Learners will be at the receiving end and will also provide continuous feed back on the system.
- **Administrative Support** from higher authorities which is a motivator and an essential prerequisite.

2. Technical requirements/logistics :

- Development of Software for a good learner management system.
- Web support dedicated for inbuilt programme specific details, teaching learning content, resources and audio-video programmes, e-content and platform for data selection, collection and backup for data storage and retrieval when required.
- A repository for counselor-learner data for sound tracking.
- Information on Links-url for programme specific assignments, e-content, uploaded videos-audios, provision for downloading videos/ audios, podcasting for viewing live videos/ lectures/ demonstrations when the learner is asynchronous.
- Chats and Discussion forums for the purpose of discussions.
- E-mailing, instant messaging and online querying system.
- Feeding of learner specific data, its storage and linkages with future activities and carrying forward of the information of a learners over 3 years time and retrieval thereafter as per requirements.
- Live video streaming for demonstrations, video lectures and web casting or teleconferencing.

3. Financial Support.

As depicted in Fig 2, the content will be posted and maintained online by Programme Coordinator at HQs and necessary updation and maintenance will be done in collaboration with the Programme Incharges and Academic Counsellors who are free to communicate with one another. The Learners as per their feasibility or schedule as laid down by RC/PSC can view the content online and clear doubts, discuss and understand the concepts specific to the course online in synchrony with the PIC/AC when online. Hence, it is as per the pace and place of the learner who is at the distance. The learners will also interact and discuss in the forums. The academic counseling shall cater to pre-admission, post admission and general student support necessary in the programme

As in Fig 3, the vision is to have an online academic counseling model which is interconnected and Learner Management System Supported. The Learners as per their counseling system would be online alongwith faculty from Headquarters and academic counselors at PSC. There shall be virtual classrooms where the course content can be shared through various modes as Live chats, discussion forums, downloads, uploads, podcasting, chatting, synchronous, asynchronous viewing and so on. The learners can immediately ask questions, clarify doubts, view related e-content, demonstrations can occur. Moreover, interactions can occur, intergroup, intra and extra group and learners all through out the country can be connected by these means as seen in Fig 2. All the information can be stored and retrieved as and when required by means of Learner Management System.

The Model when practiced would have various benefits including better tracking of the learners, better data management and maintenance with retrieval at any time as wanted. Problems that are encountered in paper transactions like loss of material, evaluation marks, assignments and so on can be removed. The model can help to bring experts, Academic Counsellors and learners on same page with proper monitoring from the Head quarters for teaching-learning process and administrative decisions and roles thus, boosting a more learner-friendly environment.

Summary:

The above model is the need of the hour since it has various merits over the traditional academic counseling and in turn promotes development of smart and fool-proof learner management systems. The model also promotes student life cycle built up in the digital system with retrieval of information at any time as required. Even though we may see the model as futuristic but it can act as the answer to various questions in the distance education platform for program of P.B.sc Nursing which is knowledge and skill based programme. Thus, online academic counseling can help to create paperless teaching learning process with flexibility and interactivity. It is the future of Nursing Education.

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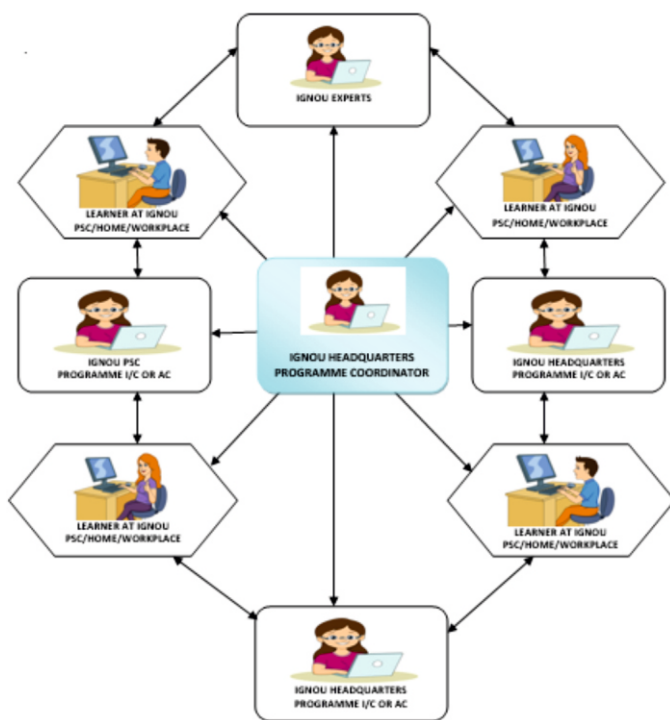


FIG 2 : MODEL FOR INTERACTIONS IN ONLINE ACADEMIC COUNSELLING IN POST BASIC BSC NURSING

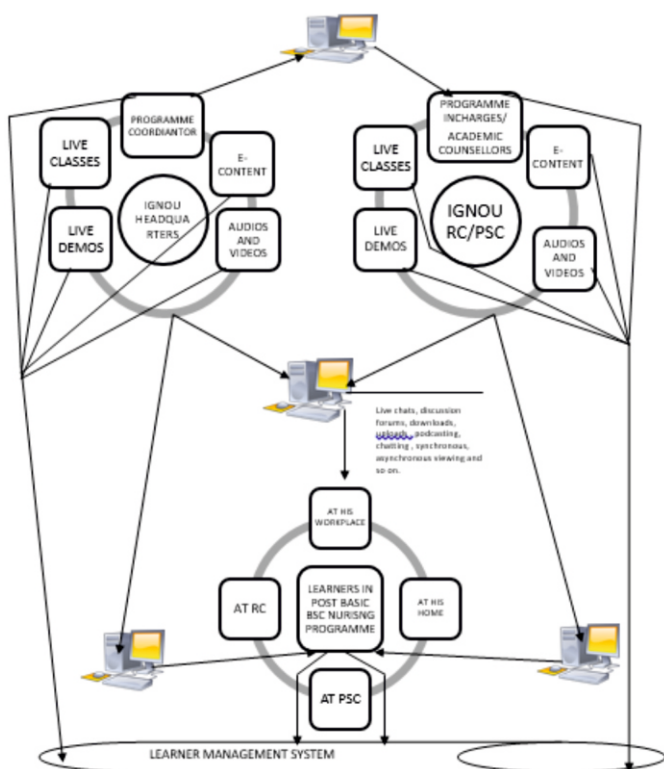


FIG 3 : MODEL FOR ACADEMIC COUNSELLING LINKED TO LMS